

Chapter Seventeen -- Dance, Lubin.

It wasn't at church that I learned some other songs I know, but they are good ones, just the same.

In fact, as I told you, I wouldn't have been in America now, most likely, if it hadn't been for a dance. At least that's the story that was handed down in the family.

It was away back before the Revolution that the first Swetnam -- I think maybe his name was Alexander, but I'm not sure -- came to Virginia. Anyway, when he did, it was by accident.

He hadn't any idea of leavin' good old Cheshire, England, for a wild an' desolate country, but some of his friends had, an' bein' single, an' a gay young dog, he went to the farewell dance on shipboard, to bid them goodbye.

I always figured he may have had a little too much to drink at that dance, for anyway, he went an' lay down an' went to sleep. An' when he woke up the ship had sailed, an' he was still on it. When he got to Virginia he liked it so well he stayed.

Another one of the family stories was about the time my great-grandpa Swetnam was a little boy.

He an' some of the other young'uns were playin' out close along the road one day when a tall, handsome man came by on a big, white horse, an' stopped where they were singin' some songs.

"I'll teach you a good song, if you want me to," he told them. They did, an' he did. The song was a long one, that began:

As I was going to Darby,
 All on a market day,
 I saw the finest ram, sir,
 That ever was fed on hay.
 Oh, he was fat behind, sir,
 And he was fat before.
 The like of him was never seen,
 And shall be seen no more.

The wool upon his back, sir,
 It reached unto the sky.
 And the eagles built their nests therein;
 I heard their young ones cry.
 The wool upon his back, sir,
 I heard the weaver say,
 Made forty thousand yards of cloth,
 He wove it in a day.

It went on for quite a ways, telling bigger an' bigger tales
 about the ram, an' finally wound up by sayin' that

The man that wrote this song, sir,
 Is the biggest liar in the world.

They liked the song, an' sang it to their folks, but didn't
 know who the man was till a neighbor came by in a day or so, an'
 asked: "What was General Washington doin' out there talkin' to
 your children so long by the road the other day?"

With such a bent for song, I don't know why we never had a

fiddler in the family. There may have been one away back, for one of our songs began:

I'll tune up my fiddle,
 An' rosin my bow,
 An' make myself welcome,
 Wherever I go.

A good fiddler was always welcome, too, except where people thought dancin' was sinful. An' with them the young folks would mostly get by with nearly the same thing, singin' an' clappin' their hands. Because the songs were different and they didn't use any musical instrument they said it wasn't dancin' -- just play-party games.

Sometimes it was kind of hard to tell the difference, though. It always seemed to me like it was a game instead of a dance we played to:

Dance, dance, Lubin, Lubin,
 Dance, dance, Lubin, light.
 Oh, dance, Lubin, light,
 All on Saturday night.

Like a lot of the other dance tunes and play-party songs, the chorus came first. The verse ran:

Turn your right hand in,
 Turn your right hand out.
 Give your right hand a shake, shake, shake,
 And turn yourself about.

There were motions like that with other verses, changing hands, using feet, and so on, and swinging your partner on the chorus.

There were some other of what we figured as dance songs that went through motions, just the same, often ending with partners kissin' which was the big idea of a lot of the games. Such as:

King William was King James' son,
An' from that royal race he sprung.
Upon his breast he wore a star,
An' he marched away to the western war.

Look to the east, an' look to the west,
An' choose the one that you love best.
If she's not there, then do your part,
An' choose another, with all your heart.

Upon this carpet you must kneel,
Just as the grass grows in the field.
Salute your bride, an' kiss her sweet,
An' now all rise upon your feet.

Some of the dance songs had a promenade part that I can't find in the books now, when I find the songs. It's easy to find people who know "Skip to me, Lou", but not the march section we used to begin the game:

I didn't come here, an' I ain't a-goin' away,
So choose you a partner, an' come along an' play.
To my hi-lo, so-lo, fol.

The British they will meet, an' their blood they
 will shed,
 An' they'll never turn back till they're colored
 deep an' red,
 To my hi-lo, so-lo, fol.

After the pairing and promenade came the quick-step:

Lost my sweetheart, skip to me, Lou,
 Lost my sweetheart, skip to me, Lou.
 Lost my sweetheart, skip to me, Lou.
 Skip to me, Lou, my darling.

It went on through the other verses, where he finds another one, "prettier'n you", and decides that if he can't get a red bird, a blue bird'll do, an' so on, till true love triumphs, an' he comes back an' swings his own partner again.

Another good one with a promenade, you don't often hear the verse of. The march went:

Walking on the green grass,
 Thus, thus, thus.
 Come all you pretty fair maids,
 An' walk along with us.
 So pretty an' so fair, as you think yourselves to be,
 If you want a partner, come walk along with me.

The dance ran:

When I left the state of Georgia,

To Alabama I did go,
Courtin' of a pretty fair maid;
Oh, her age I did not know.

Father says he is not willin'.
Mother says 'twill never do.
Yet if you will accept my hand,
I will run away with you.

But if I told you all our old dance songs this'd be a mighty
long chapter, an' it might get dry, without the music, an' a part-
ner.